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ABSTRACT

Described is a model designed to aid children with learning disabilities that is said to provide quality educational programing for learning disabled children, that maximizes the effect of the limited number of trained learning disabilities specialists available in the public schools, that maximizes the limited number of programs available for training teachers to work with children having specific learning disabilities, and that is economically feasible in terms of cost per child served. The model philosophy rests on the premise that special supportive services in the regular classroom can serve adequately those children with minor learning problems. The model consists of an achievement development class in which the learning disabled child is maintained in the regular classroom but is taught by a precision teacher, or special education teacher, who has received special training. Two aspects of the model emphasized are that the need to request psychological services for purposes of classifying the child are reduced since the child refers himself through his lack of academic progress, and that the child receives help from a specialist who is part of the school staff and the regular school program. Briefly explained are the model's organizational, training, and educational objectives. (CB)

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An Integrated Model for Individualizing Services to Children with Learning Problems

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A program model that would serve children who exhibit learning disabilities must (1) provide a quality educational program for children with learning problems, (2) maximize the effect of the limited number of trained learning disabilities specialists that are available in the public schools, (3) maximize the limited number of programs that are available for training teachers to work with children having specific learning disabilities, (4) be economically feasible in terms of the cost per child served. The model presented in this proposal has been designed to meet these requirements.

The model proposes that an educational alternative exists to self-contained special classes and resource rooms in that many children who exhibit learning problems can be served by a special education program housed in the regular class.

This class, hereafter referred to as an Achievement Development Class (ADC), is a bridge between the traditional school program and available programs in special education in that the child with learning problems is maintained in the regular classroom but is taught by a precision teacher (PT) who has received specialized training and has supportive services available. The PT is trained and employed as a regular classroom teacher and has received additional training designed to enable her to individualize instruction for children who have not progressed satisfactorily in the traditional program.

The PT is supported in her efforts to individualize instruction by having a direct accessibility to additional educational materials, by a reduced pupil-teacher ratio, by a parent volunteer and tutoring program, and by continuing training and consultation with a learning resource developer (LRD) who is trained and certified to work with SLD children. A · PT who is trained in providing direct intervention for the child with learning problems within the framework of the regular class would reduce the probability that the child would be forced out of the regular school program as a result of academic failure.

The class composition of the ADC is twenty (20) students in the regular education program and five (5) children who have learning problems. The somewhat lower pupil-teacher ratio, the opportunity for special training, and the supportive services offered by the LRDs and parents are the incentives to be used to attract the regular class teacher to participate in the ADC program and the core of the intervention strategy for working with the child exhibiting learning problems.

Existing programs for serving the child who exhibits learning problems intervene in the following steps: (1) the child fails academically, (2) psychological services are requested for the purpose of diagnosis and classification, (3) additional educational measures may be used to identify strengths and deficits, and (4) the child is removed from the regular school program on either an all day basis (i.e., self-contained classes) or for part of the school day (resource room or learning center). All current education services involve a classification process and imposing educational intervention, either total or partial, from outside the regular school program.

This model proposes two major changes in these steps. First, because the ADC is part of the regular school program, the need to request psychological services for the purpose of classifying a child are reduced. The child to be placed in the ADC has identified himself through his failure to show satisfactory academic achievement. The referral will be made by the classroom teacher who will use a learning behavior checklist to increase the precision of her observations of the child.

This concept of self referral by the child through his lack of academic progress and the opportunity for direct service within the regular program (ADC) permits teachers to react more quickly to a child's learning problems and to institute programs of remediation in the ADC which would maximize success.

Some children, whose lack of progress in the regular class has indicated the need for special education intervention, will need a more complete program than the ADC provides. When a child's emotional or learning behavior in the regular class or the ADC suggests the need for placement in a special class, appropriate psychological services are requested.

A criterion referencing strategy is employed in the ADC as an added means of screening those children needing more supportive special educational services. This plan will consist of establishing a specific learning objective, measuring the child's rate of acquisition, and comparing that rate to the progress of other children. When warranted, psychological services are supplement these evaluations.

The second major change is to offer special services within the framework of the regular class. Under existing strategies for providing special education services, the services are provided from outside the regular educational program. Specialists who work with exceptional children, including the resource and itinerant teachers, are typically not part of the ongoing regular programs of the school. As such, the children served by special education programs become isolated from the total school programs. The ADC represents an attempt to bridge this gap by providing the specialized help that a child needs from within the regular school program.

MODEL OBJECTIVES

To achieve effective programming for children with learning problems within the framework of the regular class, the following objectives are proposed:

Organizational Objectives:

1. Identify Learning Resource Developers (LRD) who have been trained in techniques of individualized instruction and are knowledgeable about materials appropriate for remediating learning problems.

2. Identify elementary schools in which to establish model programs.

3. Identify regular class teachers in grades 1 and 2 to receive instruction on the techniques of individualized instruction in a ratio of 8 teachers for every LRD.

4. Identify children with learning problems to be served in the ADC.

As a solution to the problem of training a sufficient number of specialists to work with children exhibiting learning problems, the model proposes that teachers who have been certified to teach children with specific learning disabilities might be used more effectively as resource personnel to share their skills in prescriptive teaching with other teachers. In this way, the impact of trained personnel can be multiplied through other professionals rather than limiting the trained teachers' contact to children only. The efficiency of training is maximized by focusing on active classroom teachers who have already developed many of the essential skills for working with children with learning problems.

Training Objectives

The expertise of LRDs is extended to PTs in the following manner:

1. Providing pretraining institute for the PT which focus on identifying the specific skills necessary for the regular classroom teacher to employ precision teaching.

2. Instituting an in-service program with the PTs which develops skills in writing an analysis of observed behavior, writing specific behavioral objectives, identifying components of a complex task, sequencing the components, manipulating the contingencies of performance, and identifying appropriate commercial materials to implement an individualized program, and development of teacher made material.

3. Providing weekly visits by the LRDs to the ADCs which continues training and assists the PTs to utilize techniques of precision teaching by cooperatively working with children with learning problems.

4. Providing an information network through monthly meetings between LRDs and Pts concerning the latest developments in methods and materials, the availability of materials, and success of using various methods and materials in the regular class.

5. Stimulating an interest in other teachers to receive special training. This interest is demonstrated by an increase in the number of volunteers for training at the beginning of the second year of the project.

The educational goal for the child is to assist him (her) to remain in the regular class by providing him a teacher (PT) trained in the techniques of individualized instruction.

Educational Objectives

1. Increase the time a regular class teacher is able to devote to children having learning problems.

2. Increase amount of individualized work which is provided a child with learning problems.

3. Reduce the number of referral for children with learning problems to be placed in special classes.

4. Stimulate achievement gains for children with learning problems in the ADC that are greater than the achievement gains for similar children served in resource rooms and self-contained classes for the SLD child.

LRDs work with each PT for half a school day each week. The interaction is in the form of the LRD helping individual children directly, thus, serving as a model to the PT. During the course of the week an LRD has worked with children in eight classes located in four different schools. The fifth day is available for LRDs to do additional work with individual teachers, to provide teachers with special materials, or to do inservice work with groups of teachers.

The content of the educational intervention is the established curriculum of the regular classroom program. This model proposes no curricular changes for the children served but a model for maximizing the number of children who reach the existing educational objectives.

Specialized intervention materials are employed to reach the established goals. Materials introduced into the ADC which increase the amount of interaction between the child and the material. The use of material which provides an increased feedback to the child permits increased individualization and remedial materials that are supplemental to the regular program provides instructional loops for children requiring more time and involvement with the material to attain the established curricular objectives.

The duration of the planned intervention for each child can only be specified on an individual basis and is the result of constant reevaluation of the child's educational progress. A child is served in the ADC until the PT, LRD, school psychologist, and principal decide that (1) the child has made sufficient progress to enable him to successfully handle the regular academic program without supportive services, (2) the child requires more extensive service which must be provided in another administrative setting [e.g., a resource room or special class], or (3) that the child has not and is not expected to show educationally significant gains in the ADC and could be served as effectively in a regular classroom setting.

The utility of the proposed model must be viewed in terms of the total school program for working with children with learning problems. In addition to providing a supportive placement enabling children with learning problems to remain in a regular class, the model can serve as a transitional classroom for children moving from special to regular class placement. An intermediate step between special class or even resource room placement would enhance the probability of successful return to regular class placement.

A major dividend of the proposed model should be its affect on the regular school program. Accelerated academic advancement might be expected from the average children in the ADC as a result of the participating teachers' expertise and the availability of additional materials. An additional spin-off benefit would be the sharing of methodology and materials with other teachers in the school.

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